A

QUESTION

Propounded to the Rulers, Teachers, and People of the Nation of *England*, for them ſingly to anſwer in their hearts and conſciences, in the fear and dread of the mighty God of Heaven and Earth, whoſe mighty arm of power is ſtretched out in this Nation, firſt to overturn what ſtands in his way, and then to eſtabliſh (in the place thereof) what he hath purpoſed in his heart.

And this is the thing which the Lord hath determined to do, both particularly in perſons, and generally throughout the earth; namely to pull down the Mighty from their Seats, and to exalt the humble and meek, (who are made ſuch by the preſence and power of his life in them) that he alone may be exalted in the ſpirits of his People, and throughout the earth. And this work hath the Lord begun already; for his great and notable day hath appeared, and breaketh forth apace, though the eye which is cloſed cannot ſee it, nor the benummed ſenſe feel it. But he that hath an ear, let him hear the ſound of the Lords Trumpet, which ſaith in the mighty breath of his ſpirit of life, Awake ye dead, and ſtand up to judgement; for the day of Recompence is come, the day of the eternal vengeance of our God, and the day of his everlaſting mercy and plentiful redemption. The Queſtion is as followeth.

QUESTION.

WHen *this Nation was rent from Popery* (in part I mean, for wholly it was never rent, but did ſtill retain the ſame ſpirit, though by the Magiſtrates Sword it was forced from that Form and way of Worſhip, which the *Pope* had eſtabliſhed) *did it wait on the Lord for the guidance of his Spirit and power, thereby to build up a true Church and habitation for God in the*

ſpirit?

ſpirit? Or did it take ſuch materials as were ready at hand, and frame up a building as well as it could, wherewith the conſciences of many (that were tender hearted towards God) were even then diſatisfyed, and felt, in the eternal life of God, the reformation not to be right in its beginning?

This is a weighty Queſtion: for an errour at firſt, an errour in the foundation is great, and the cauſe of many following errours. If the Spirit of God was not then conſulted with, and waited upon, if he did not raiſe the fabrick, ſurely the building was not right. It was the Spirit of God which rent men from Popery (ſo far as they were acted upon pure & honeſt principles) ſhewing the blackneſs and darkneſs thereof, and kindling deſires in men after a more inward and ſpiritual way of Worſhip; Thus far was of him. But if men did then conſult with their own wiſdom, for the ordering and carrying on of the reformation, and ſo upon politick grounds and reaſons, did raiſe up a building, and not wait on the Lord for his light and power to build with; then ſurely that building was not of God, nor could he be honoured thereby, nor his truth preſerved, nor the integrity and conſcientiouſneſs of his peoples hearts towards him cheriſhed: but all this would ſuffer, and be in danger by this building, and a contrary ſpirit be pleaſed with it, and thrive under it. And hath it not been ſo? were not the non-conformiſts to it (though known to be pretious perſons in the favour and life of God) looked upon and dealt with as enemies, while ſuch conformiſts as were known to be looſe and ſcandalous, yet could flouriſh wel enough, & make a fair ſhew in this National Church, and be zealous contenders for the way of Worſhip and Government in it? Yea, thoſe that have been ſtrict in their lives and converſations, and truly zealous towards God, in their ſouls and Spirits, preſſing after righteouſneſs and purity; ſuch as theſe though they might conform, yet were they not hated, nicknamed, in ſcorn called Puritans, and ſnares laid for them to intrap them? And how could it be otherwiſe? For if the building was not right, if the conſtitution and Government of this Church was not of God, then it could not favour and cheriſh that which was of God, then it could not nouriſh or be pleaſed with obedience to his pure life and Spirit, but rather with obedience to its carnall form. For ſo it is in truth and reality.

reality before God, This Church with its whole constitution, Government, Order, and way of Worship was either of Gods Spirit, and so spiritual, or of mans wisdome, and so carnal. If of Gods Spirit, then it wil be a friend to that which is spiritual, and an enemy to that which is carnal: if of mans wisdome, then it will be a friend to that which is carnal, and an enemy to that which is spiritual. And this is a true mark of the true Church, and of the true Church power and Government, it begets and preserves that which is spiritual, it beats down the carnal; whereas that Church power and Government which is carnall, preserves that which is carnal (a carnal unity, a carnal uniformity in worship &c.) but checks, snibbs, smites, and persecutes that which is spiritual: and such a kind of power and Government to be set up, the carnal part in every man contends and cries out for. And so long as there is any change made in this Church by the same wisdome it will never be otherwise, it will be but from carnal to carnal, and so still against that which is spiritual. Therefore look back sirgly, and consider what the building was, and how it was reared up, and see whether it was of God, or no? Or whether it was built up in the forwardness of mans spirit, by carnal reasonings and consultings, accommodating things to the present state of the Nation, and not to the plain and clear measure of Gods truth.

First, See what the materials were whereof this Church was built. Were they materials fit to make up a true Church of? Was it built up of a people truly converted to *God*? Of persons charged in heart? Of persons sensible of the fore going idolatry, and turned in their souls, minds, and spirits from dead Idols towards the living God? Or was not rather the heart of the Nation still inclined towards Popery, even while it was turning into a Protestant Church? And was it not cheifly made a Protestant Church by the force of the civil power, which wound in by degrees a Protestant interest, the heart of the people still remaining unchanged, and hankering after Popery, but at length, in tract of time, seeing they knew not how to help it, won over to Protestanism with the same heart and spirit, that they came out of Popery with? Consider seriously in the sight of God (who looketh both forward and backward upon things with a true eye) whether it hath been thus or no?

Secondly, See what kind of Miniſtry was then ſet up. Was it a new Miniſtry (as *John Huſs* that famous *Bohemian* Martyr propheſied ſhould ariſe, and as *Luther* ſaw the neceſſity of, utterly diſclaiming the deriving of orders from Popiſh Biſhops) or was it the ſame Miniſtry which was derived from *Rome?* It is a ſore ſtroſſe the Miniſters of *England* have been put to, namely, to plead for the truth of the Miniſtry of the Church of *Rome*, that thereby they might defend their own. Now mark this thing following, There aroſe falſe Apoſtles, falſe Prophets, falſe Teachers in the Apoſtle daies, whom Satan clothed like true Apoſtles, like true Prophets, like *Miniſters of righteouſneſs*. Thus they appeared, thus they ſeemed to be, but they were not of God, but Satan; not ſent of God, not inſpired by God, but inſpired and ſent by Satan. Theſe falſe Apoſtles, theſe falſe Prophets fought againſt the true Church, and true Miniſtry of Chriſt. And though they were oftentimes diſcovered, by the Spirit of Chriſt in his Church, and the Church preſerved from them, yet we find related in Scripture, that at length they did prevaile, inſomuch as the third part of the true Miniſters was ſhaken, and ſwept down from their place and ſtanding by them, *Rev.* 12. 4. yea at length the Church her ſelf (as to the truth of her outward ſtate) overcome, and fled into the wilderneſs, *verſ.* 6. & 14. and a falſe Church got up in her ſtead, which hath a cup of fornication to make people ſpiritually drunk, and to bewitch them from the true worſhip of God, into imitations and likeneſſes, *Rev.* 17. 4. and thoſe who will not acknowledge her likeneſſes & imitations to be the truth, but in the word of the Lambs Teſtimony witneſs againſt them, ſhe drinks their blood, *ver.* 6. Now can any man of any manner of ſerioufneſs and ſobriety of Spirit, (who is not drunk & overcome with this Whores wine) beleive, that after falſe Porphets had got the day, and ſet up the falſe Church, that they would ſet up the true Miniſtry in it? O how blind have men been, that they ſhould go about, and take ſuch pains to derive a ſucceſſion of the true Miniſtry, from the Miniſters or Prophets of the falſe Church!

Thirdly, What kind of maintenance was ſet up for this Miniſtry? Was it a Goſpel maintenance? Was it that they ſhould live of the Goſpel, which cannot but open mens ſpirits to the true Miniſters thereof? Or was it a maintenance forced from the

the people, by that outward power which ſet up the Church? And was this maintenance like unto, or the ſame with the maintenance which the Popiſh Miniſtry had before in this Nation, for their idolatrous ſervice?

Fourthly, What kind of Worſhip was it, which was ſet up? Was it the worſhip of the Goſpel, which is in ſpirit and truth? Or was it a form of worſhip invented by man, and ſo accommodated to the preſent temper of the Nation, that they might with the more eaſe and willingneſs ſtep out of Popery into it, becauſe of its nearneſs and likeneſs thereto?

Fifthly, What kind of *Church* Government was ſet up? Was it a pure ſpiritual Government? Was it put into the hands of the ſpirit? (For nothing is to govern, or can rightly govern over the ſpirits of *Chriſts* people in ſpiritual things, but the ſpirit of *Chriſt*.) Or did men frame up a *Church* Government by their wiſdome, and put it into the hands of ſuch, as might exerciſe it without, yea and againſt the Spirit?

Sixthly, What kind of order was ſet up in this *Church*? Was it the true Goſpel order? Was it the order of *Chriſts* Spirit, whereby the carnal wiſdome of man might be quenched, and his ſpirit have ſcope? Or was it a carnal order, whereby the carnal wiſdome, learning, knowledge, and arts of man might have ſcope, and the ſpirit in its motions bequenched?

Seventhly, By what wiſdome was the Common Prayer Book compiled and ſet up, and ſurplices, croſſes, and other cerimonies injoyned? Was it by the wiſdome of Gods Spirit, for the building up of the ſpirits of his people in the faith? Or was it for the pleaſing and ſatisfying of the carnal part in people? And what ſort of perſons were they who did moſt contend for, and were moſt pleaſed with theſe? Were they, for the generality, the ſtricter, or the looſer ſort?

Eightly, How came it about, that the ſupream Magiſtrate of this Nation, was made cheif head and governor of this *Church* under *Chriſt*? Was this from *Chriſts* inſtitution, or of mans wiſdome and invention? If of mans inventing wiſdome, then againſt *Chriſt*, then of Antichriſts ſpirit, who exalteth that which is not of *Chriſt*, to ſit and govern in his temple.

O weigh theſe things, look about thee, O *England*: O Rulers, Teachers, and People look about you? And if it plainly,

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upon a naked ſearch appear, that there was at the very firſt a foundation laid of ſuppreſſing the true worſhip, and the witneſſes to it, do not ſhut your eyes. Have not the people of God ſtill been miſ-repreſented, had reproachful names caſt upon them, and in ſome degree or other been perſecuted from the beginning of the reformation? And though names change, and Rulers change, and the teachers change, and the people alſo change in their religion and worſhips, yet is not the perſecuting Spirit ſtill the ſame, and the perſecuted Spirit ſtill the ſame alſo. The perſecuting Spirit changeth its cover often, but ſtill retains its nature, hunting after the life and pure power of the Spirit, in the Children which are begotten of God. Are not the people of God in every change a deſpiſed people, and their integrity towards God ſtill ſtruck at? When the Lord began a little to wipe off the reproach from them, at the beginning of theſe troubles, and the perſecuting Spirit could not ſo conveniently hunt them any longer under the name of *Puritans*, then other names were invented for them, whereby the ſame ſpirit ſought to make them appear odious again, under a new reproachful title, that ſo it might be perſecuting the ſame thing afreſh? O how mightily hath the Lord ſtriven to keep the Powers and people of this Nation from falling upon his people! and yet ſtill ſo ſoon as they come to any peace, and feeling of power, they are at it again. O *England*, thy perſiſting in this, cannot but bring wrath upon thee. What wouldſt thou have of us? Shall we not fear the Lord? Shall we not obey the Lord? Shall we not worſhip the Lord our God, who hath redeemed, and is redeeming our ſouls from death? Shall we not be *Proteſtants* in truth and uprightneſs of heart before the Lord? Shall we not teſtifie againſt the Popiſh Spirit, and Popiſh practiſes, and all new inventions of the ſame ſpirit (though they get never ſo fine a covering) in the Church of *England*, as well as againſt them in the Church of *Rome*? The Lord is our witneſs, we would not offend thee, O *England*, no not the meaneſt perſons of the whole Nation: but from out of *Popery* are we called (and from what ever elſe the ſame nature and Spirit may take up in the ſtead of it) to follow the Lord our God towards the land of the living; and follow him we muſt, however thou deal with us. O *England*, If it had been ſo, that thy Rulers had built upon a

true Church, yet the evil Spirit, the unclean Spirit would have endeavoured to pollute it, to provoke the Lord to remove his candlestick (which is an inward act of his Spirit, the outward building might stand notwithstanding) and then thy house must have been left desolate, and the same Spirit would then have called his people out of it: but if thy building hath not been Spiritual, and in the Spirit, how can the Spirit of the Lord, suffer the Children begotten by him, to lodge in it! O when wilt thou have an ear to hear, that the Lords wrath may asswage towards thee, which kindleth more and more, and is entring apace within thy bowels! This, this is the Lords charge against thee, *Thou art for the Protestant name* (it is now become thy interest, and a goodly covering in thy eyes) *but against the Protestant Spirit*, which the Lord calleth to follow him further and further from all the things of Popery, and from all the things like Popery. And the Lord will put a difference between the Protestant Name, and the Protestant Spirit: between them that serve him in the fear which he begets in the heart, and them that set up that kind of fear wich is taught by the precepts of men. O *England*, we are now seemingly in thy hands (who hast long handled us very roughly) and we have no strength against thee, nor no hope of deliverance from thee, but in the Lord our God, and there we are at rest, waiting upon him in the innocency, and integrity which he hath begotten in our hearts, until he plead our cause. And in that day, thou wilt see that we have not been thine enemies, and then thou wilt mourn over that mist of darkness, which hath with-held thine eye from discerning what true friends we have been to thee, and how we have endeavoured, and fought with our hearts to prevent thy drinking of that bitter cup, which is to go round the Nations. And if thine ear could have been opened, thou mightest have been spared.

POST-SCRIPT.

THE *Gospel is free, the grace and mercy thereof free, the Spirit a free Spirit* (*freely given of God, and freely ministring for God*) *the Church a Spiritual building, built in the Free-*

Freedome and Liberty of the Life of the Spirit, the order and government of the Church is from and in the same free Spirit, guiding a people whom God makes willing in the day of his power, the maintenance of the Ministry a free maintenance, their whole obedience and worship free, in the free spirit, and in truth which is begotten in the heart by the free spirit. The head of this Church is Christ, the living Spirit, who hath appointed none to be Head under him here on earth, nor hath given power to any to make any Laws concerning his Kingdome, the Government thereof, concerning his Ministry, or the maintenance thereof. (Is it not thus? Doth not the least child Light see it to be thus?) But the Church of England *was a Church built up by force, setled by force, upheld by force, her Ministers maintained by force, her Order, Unity, Uniformity and Government forcible, and the free pure spirit of life can have no scope in her, but according to the wills of her Rulers, Teachers, and People: if it move otherwise, if it appear otherwise, it is sure to be nick-named and persecuted. O* England, England, *can God alwayes suffer these things? Will not his hand at length be stretched forth against thee?*

14. of 12. Month, 1659. *Given forth by* Isaac Penington (*the younger*) *in the fear and dread of the most High.*

The day of the Lord so cometh, as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape, 1 Thes. 5, 2, 3. And when the Lord cometh, Woe to him who is found beating his fellow Servants, and endeavouring to force the Conscience, (which God hath made tender and pliable to the voyce of his Spirit) from its obedience and subjection thereto.

THE END.

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